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Question1:

Question2:

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Question5: The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) is a nonprofit, fee-for-service research organization that addresses social, economic, and resource-based problems of rural people and communities. Based in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Vermont, the Center provides consulting, research, and program evaluation services in Vermont, the United States, and abroad. The Center also serves as the U.S. Census Bureau's Vermont State Data Center.

Over the past year, CRS has been actively engaged in discussions around Vermont about increasing access to broadband, high-speed internet access to rural communities for economic development reasons and to farms for business information and communications needs. Among the organizations and committees we have been collaborating are the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the Vermont Broadband Council and the Vermont House of Representatives' Rural Economic Development Work Group. After several meetings with interested public citizens, business owners, farmers, policy makers, and public and non-profit organization administrators, we come to the following conclusions.

? High speed internet is quickly becoming an essential utility, just like electricity and telephone service. The Internet is "out-growing" traditional dial-up access.

? If a region does not have broadband, people are less likely to move and invest there.

? Cable companies have not made these investments in rural parts of Vermont, or other areas in rural America, and the telephone companies appear averse to invest in the installation of the "last mile" of high speed DSL technology.

? The dependence of family farmers and specialty food producers on increasingly global markets requires access to information and communication technologies that urban areas have come to take for granted.

? Small grants provided through CDBG funds, and Vermont's Department of Economic Development are worthy, but the process is too slow and the resources too meager to make the necessary advancements.

? Approximately 40% of the state's geography has no broadband coverage.

? Demonstration projects will help citizens, farmers and business owners see the applications of broadband access and how the technology "works".

? Market research is required to identify the level and amount of broadband coverage, the level and types of uses to which it could be

employed by rural citizens and businesses, how marketing and distribution strategies could be affected with these applications, and how rural communities and businesses might be able to reinvigorate and reinvent themselves after decades of "brain drain" and capital flight from rural areas to more urban areas.

A recent national study by The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that two thirds of rural dial-up users either don't know of their options to get faster technology, or have already investigated and found that it is unavailable in their areas. Much like in national trends, the key barrier to broadband access in Vermont is rurality. Poll data from 2004 shows that only 28.2% of rural Vermont households with internet access have broadband connections, versus 52.5% of suburban households and 62.3% of urban households. A national policy that recognizes the importance of universal broadband service requires commitments to make it happen including demonstration projects to assist its adoption, as well as firm investments toward Vermont's goal of 100% coverage in rural areas by 2010.

We must redouble our efforts and our commitments as a society to build essential communication and information connections from rural areas to the world.

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